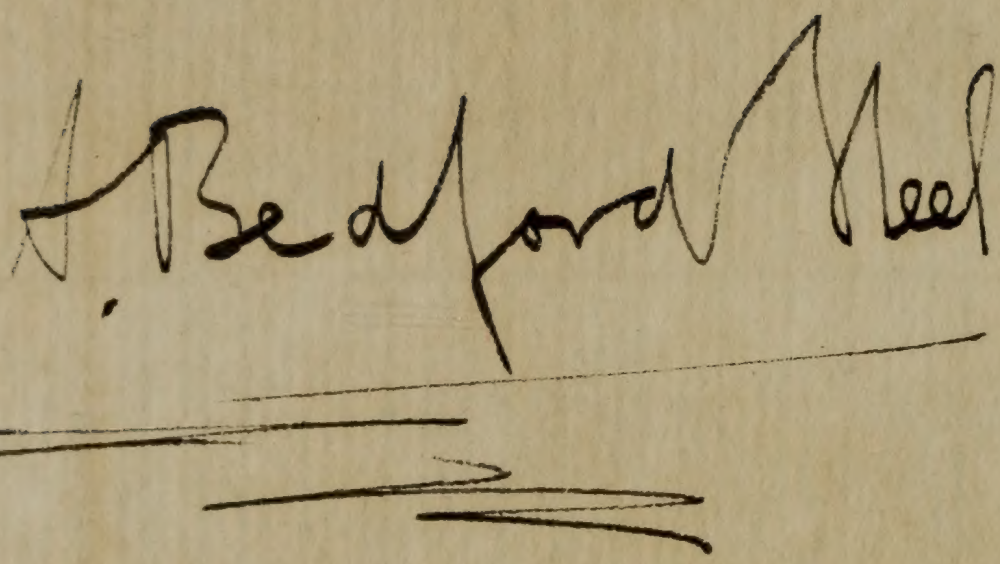
LLADES OF FRANCOIS VILLON
INTERPRETED INTO ENGLISH
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BALLADES OF FRANCOIS VILLON

INTERPRETED INTO ENGLISH VERSE BY PAUL HOOKHAM

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THE QUATRAIN Which Villon composed when he was Condemned to Death.

FRANCIS am I by evil fate,
At Paris born, of low estate,
Whose course a rope shall end, and straight
My neck shall know my body's weight.

BALLADE Of the Ladies of Former Times.

SAY, where and in what country is
Flora, the beautiful Romane;
Archipiada, and Thaïs,
Who cousin was to her germane;
Echo, whose music, voiced again
O'er lake and river, cheats the ear,
With lovely look beyond humane?
Where are the snows that fell last year?

Where is the all-wise Heloïse,
For whom unmanned, to his soul's gain,
Pierre Esbaillart at Sainct-Denys
Made end of love in claustral pain;
Or where the queen who did ordain
That Buridan, her fame to clear,
Should drown in waters of the Seine?
Where are the snows that fell last year?

Queen Blanche, as lily fair, I wis,
Who sang in silver-clearest strain;
Tall Bertha, Bietris, Allys;
Harembourges, regnant over Maine;
And Jeanne, maid-warrior of Lorraine,
Our martyred saint to memory dear;
Where are they, Virgin soveraine?
Where are the snows that fell last year?

Prince, ask not where they dwell, that train
Evanished from our earthly sphere,
Lest this refrain be idly vain:
Where are the snows that fell last year?

BALLADE Of the Lords of Former Times.

WHAT more? Where is the third Calixte, Last of that name which honour won, Who held four years the Papaliste? Alphonse, the king of Aragon? The duke illustrious of Bourbon,
And Artus, he of fair Bretaigne,
And Charles the Seventh, they call Le Bon?
But where is Valour's Star, Charlemaigne?

Where is the portent king Scotiste,
Whose face, with mother-mark thereon,
On one side flamed like amethiste
From temple downward to jawbone?
The king of Chypre, that famous one;
Yes, and the good king of Espaigne,
Whose name to me is all unknown?
But where is Valour's Star, Charlemaigne?

From citing further I desist;
And vain is all comparison:

Not one of them could death resist,
Or 'gainst that tyrant hold his own.
Yet would I ask, ere I be done,
King Lancelot, pride of far Behaigne:
Where is he, where his grandsire, gone?
But where is Valour's Star, Charlemaigne?

Where is Claquin, the good Breton;
D'Auvergne who ruled his broad champaigne;
The duke, once famed, of Alencon?
But where is Valour's Star, Charlemaigne?

THE COMPLAINT Of the beautiful Armouress in Old Age.

I THINK I hear her thus complain,
So lovely once, how changed soe'er,
The Armouress, with chidings vain,
And words like these might fall from her:

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So lovely once, how changed soe'er,
The Armouress, with chidings vain,
And words like these might fall from her:

" Ah, felon Age, remembrancer
Of love's defeat and beauty wronged,
What solace now can life confer,
What dawn of hope in days prolonged?

" Robbed am I of the haughty sway
My charms ensured, the homage shown
By merchants, bookmen, church and lay;
Not one of these in all the town
Who would not throw his treasure down,
Of wealth or words, as lovers use,
If only he might call his own
What vagrant rogues would now refuse.

" A many men have I repelled,
(Which argued no great wit in me),
For one from whom I nought withheld;
Fair, young and treacherous was he;
Yet let who might my votaries be,
'Fore God I loved that graceless lad,
Who spoke me rudeness frank and free,
And loved, not me but all I had.

"I had not let him rate me so,
And trample on me, but for this:
To fetch and carry, come and go,
For him, I deemed no less than bliss,
And all for one forgetting kiss!
The wretch, of illest life and fame,
Took me to those false arms of his,
And left—to what? To sin and shame.

"Well, he is dead this thirty year,
And still I linger, white and worn:
Heavens, when I think, those days so dear,
What once they were, how lapsed forlorn,
When I behold this body shorn
Of tattered dress, and see the change:
Poor, wasted, frail abode of scorn:
My heart leaps up with frenzy strange.

"What has become of forehead smooth,
Of flowing locks and arching brow;
The sidelong glance, to stir or soothe,
And make at will the wisest bow;

The nose as nobly straight, I vow,
As e'er was nose, the ear's pink shell,
The dimpled chin, and pearls arow
Half peeping through the lips' vermeil?

"The queenly shoulders that were mine,
The arm and hand's proud slenderness,
Firm throat and bosom, curving line
Of waist and hip devised express
As ensigns of love's arbitress?
In truth, that I was faultless fair
The weariest lover might confess,
And wander through my garden there.

"Greyed hair, and front in furrows vile,
Shagged eyebrows, eyes bereft of fire,
That once with play of look and smile
Could wake the flame of young desire,
Or beauty's bard with song inspire;
Ears, nose, in shrivelled fellowship,
A visage struck with paleness dire,
Peaked chin, and writhe of parchment lip:

"Of grace departed what arrears!
Arms stunted, hands deformed and dry,
Shoulders bowed down with weight of years,
Breasts withered, giving breasts the lie;
Hip, waist—what curve to know them by?
A garden this? A human blight,
The ghost of beauty whence would fly
All love and lovers in affright.

"So we bewail the good time gone,
Dim crones shrunk small from Nature's mould,
All huddled close, in sorrow one,
Like quick-lit fires, in ashes cold
Soon spent; and so the tale is told:
What then we thought, what now we know,
In misery's school grown wisely old.
A many and many have gossiped so."

BALLADE Of the beautiful Armouress: To the Wantons.

BETHINK you, handsome Gantière,
Who were my scholar long ago,
And you, Blanche la Savatière,
Time presses on, as well you know.
The men, have at them, high and low,
While yet you may, I counsel you:
For Age approaches, beauty's foe:
'Tis but a coin that rings untrue.

"And you, my fair Saulcissière,
Who dance with such a nimble grace,
And Guillemette la Tapissière,
Flout not your mistress to her face.
For withered bloom there is no place,
Though flaunted bold in all men's view,
When Age falls out from Time's quick race:
'Tis but a coin that rings untrue.

"Frisk you, la Chaperonnière,
Ere youthless languor be revealed,
And, Katherine la Bouchière,
Drive not the men, like herds, afield.
Sour looks will come; and shall they yield,
The scoffers then who used to sue?
Never could Age love's armour wield:
'Tis but a coin that rings untrue.

"Girls, when your charms no more allure,
Ask you why miseries should accrue?
'Tis that for Age there's no more cure
Than for a coin that rings untrue."

DOUBLE BALLADE Of the Deceitfulness of Love.



OLLOW Love's pageants as you will,
His feasts of triumph and delight,
It is a sport that prospers ill,
And brings you into mournful plight;

Such pranks, of wisdom's growth the blight,
Made Solomon his faith to flee,
And plunged strong Samson's eyes in night:
Happy his lot that's fancy-free!

Orpheus, whose minstrelsy was heard
By rocks and trees, so sweet he played,
Three-headed Cerberus must beard,
For which with life he might have paid;
Narcissus, lovely youth, betrayed
By his own loveliness, we see
Dead in a fountain's bosom laid:
Happy his lot that's fancy-free!

Sardana, prince of chivalry,
A conqueror mid battle's din,
Must stoop to fashions womanly,
And with the maidens weave and spin;
David, sage prophet, thought to win,
The fear of God forgetting, he,
A bathing girl to act of sin:
Happy his lot that's fancy-free!

Amnon conceived desire to move
(Feigning a love of pastry fine)
His sister fair in terms of love :
Desire most foully libertine ;
Herod, between his cups of wine,
Must John the Baptist's doom decree,
For her whose jigs he deemed divine :
Happy his lot that's fancy-free !

As for poor love-struck me, that I
Like clothes awash was beaten well,
All naked, I will not deny.
Who set that trap in which I fell ?
Why, who but Katherine de Vauselles ?
Noé was there and shared with me
That drubbing, as his bones can tell :
Happy his lot that's fancy free !

But think you our young bachelor
Will leave his amorous traffic ? No !
Not though 'twere sin you burnt him for,
Like broom-borne witch : it flatters so,

The siren call that brings him woe
When folly claims at last its fee.
Thus dearest friend turns dearest foe:
Happy his lot that's fancy-free!

BALLADE Which Villon made at the request of his Mother: "pour prier Notre Dame."



ELESTIAL Regent, Queen who rulest here, Guardian supreme o'er all the powers of Hell, Make me, thy Christian, humble howsoe'er,
Among thy chosen evermore to dwell,
Though merit have I none, I know full well.
The goodness, Lady, Mistress, that is thine
Is greater far than sin that can be mine.
Without that goodness never soul can fly
To Heaven, unworthy save by grace divine.
'Tis in that faith that I should live and die.

Say to thy Son that I am His through thee,
That so through Him my sins may be forgiven.
As thou didst succour Mary, succour me,
Or that Theophilus who, vowed to Heaven
But sunk in foul apostasy, was shriven,
When that his pact with Satan he forswore.
Let no such Spirit tempt me, I implore,
Virgin intact who carried'st stainlessly
The sacramental Host whom we adore.
'Tis in that faith that I would live and die.

I am a woman poor and weak and old,
And ignorant: no letter can I read;
My church my teacher: there do I behold
Paradise painted, with its gracious meed
Of harp and lute, and Hell where is decreed
Sin's doom: the one I fear; the other fills
My soul with joy and all its being thrills.
Be mine that bliss, sure Refuge, Goddess high,
Sweet Remedy, through faith, of mortal ills.
'Tis in that faith that I would live and die.

Thou gavest birth, Immaculate Princess,
To Jesus, Him whose reign is limitless.
All-Powerful, He endued our powerlessness;
For us, disclaiming might and majesty,
He suffered death that we should life possess.
Such is Our Lord, and such I do confess.
'Tis in that faith that I would live and die.

BALLADE Of Villon to his Mistress.

FALSE beauty, you who long have
cost me dear, Cruel behind a mask
of fairest face; Hard Love, as iron
hard, to thrust and tear,
A dagger lurking in your every grace;
Murderous charm with death in its embrace;
Pride lying hid to play a deadly part;
Merciless eyes, where justice finds no place
To soothe the anguish of a wounded heart!

Better to other solace had I flown,
(And that indeed had seemed my happiness
If only this fond spell I could disown),
Forced to dishonour 'neath dishonour's stress:
Fie on them both, the greater and the less!
What is that less? Love's unrequited smart,
If pity wake not yet, with late redress,
To soothe the anguish of a wounded heart.

A day will come when your expanded bloom
Aweary of the sun shall droop and fade:
Then should I mock at ageing beauty's doom:
But no; 'twere folly then; time's debt were paid;
Myself grown old, your every charm decayed.
Reign in your pride, but sheathe its poisoned dart;
Show not to all the rigour that forbade
To soothe the anguish of a wounded heart.

Prince of all Loves, in Godhead's might arrayed,
'Tis not in man thy sovereign will to thwart;
Yet humbly would I supplicate thy aid
To soothe the anguish of a wounded heart.

LAY

DEATH, who hast my dear mistress
ta'en, I plead against thy harsh de-
cree, That, cruel yet, thou leavest me
To linger on where grief had slain.
Life is to me a bitter pain:
But how did her sweet life hurt thee,
Death?

One heart we had, though we were twain;
If that is dead, my life must be
Henceforth the mockery that we see
In statues heartless and inane,
Death!

BALLADE AND PRAYER

WITH Father Noe, who the vine did
plant, With you too, Lot, whom
once, by wine obsessed, The mis-
chief-working God, all-procreant,

Of your lewd daughters made the sorry jest :
They mocked, those naughty ones, your shame confessed :
With Architriclin, long time afterward
Wine's minister, I pray his soul may rest,
The thirsty soul of Master John Cotard.

From all your jolly race was he derived
Who drank, like you, so wisely and so well ;
And though in no great style or state he lived
Among his toping peers he bore the bell ;
No brooding care his jovial heart could quell,
No worldly scruple hand from cup retard :
With you, great Sirs, his soul deserves to dwell,
The thirsty soul of Master John Cotard.

Oft have I seen him staggering home to bed,
Like staggering Age to its last bed of all ;
And once a parlous bump adorned his head,
From chance collision with a butcher's stall.
Briefly, of roysterers bold and bacchanal

Was none more worthy of recording bard.
Bid enter, when you hear its whistling call,
The thirsty soul of Master John Cotard.

Prince, he could hardly spit as far as earth;
He had a throat as dry as beetle's shard;
Of drink it ne'er could overcome the dearth:
The thirsty soul of Master John Cotard.

BALLADE Which Villon gave to a Gentleman newly wedded, to send to his Wife whom he had won with the Sword.

LO now the eager hawk, at lift of night, Content his noble schooling to endure, Flaps loud his wings, atremble with delight, Snatches his meat and strains towards his lure.
Elate as he, and fired with passion pure,

I hail the day assigned to love alone;
This day has Love foretold, with presage sure:
And that's the reason you and I are one.

Mistress of my wayfaring you shall reign,
Absolute, ever, to the very end;
Fresh laurel, sign of life's victorious gain,
Fair olive, pledge of peace, securest friend.
Fealty forbids the thought that could descend
(And 'tis a bidding would be scorned by none)
From highest service love of mine can lend:
And that's the reason you and I are one.

And, what is more, when darker skies shall frown,
And Fortune's gathering storm my days embroil,
Your gentle eyes shall beat her malice down,
As winds the reek of smoke's uprising coil.
In your sweet field Time's envy I shall foil;
There shall new springing life for death atone;
God wills it that I till that gracious soil:
And that's the reason you and I are one.

Princess, no more but this, the homage due
To truth no chance can shake nor change dethrone:
My life is yours; I claim the like of you:
And that's the reason you and I are one.

BALLADE Of the Women of Paris.



ENICE, for pretty girls, by some
The Queen of Cities has been styled;
Calais, Geneva, Florence, Rome,
Their fair have many a heart beguiled;
But, faith, I'd say, though these defiled
Before me, boasting their renown,
For sweetest lips that ever smiled
There's not a town like Paris town.

The Naples women, so 'tis said,
In subtle speech their fancy hide;
Germans and Prussians, many a maid,
Whispering together oft are spied;

But while, with hopes and fears, the tide
Of love through all the world steals down,
For sweetest lips that ever sighed
There's not a town like Paris town.

The Breton dames have little grace;
They seem love's meaning to have missed;
A fish-wife from our market-place
More clearly sees the matter's gist;
English, Lorrainers swell the list,
Picards and Swiss, Italians brown.
For sweetest lips that ever kissed
There's not a town like Paris town.

Prince, among nations far and near
That twine their flowers in beauty's crown,
For sweetest lips that ever were
There's not a town like Paris town.

BALLADE Of Good Counsel to those of Evil Life.

WHETHER a hawker of bulls you be, With cards, dice, coins, what-e'er your tricks, You'll get your fingers burnt, I see,
As bodies are of heretics;
Be you a rogue who steals and picks,
Or robber bold; do you ruffle or slink?
Where goes the booty? None of it sticks—
All to waste on doxies and drink.

Rhyming, raillery, cymbals, flutes,
Folly and shams of endless kind;
Farce, imbroglio, twanging of lutes;
Plays that in towns their market find;
Mysteries, games of Fortune blind;
Gamblers' chances that grow or shrink:
Where goes the profit on wings of wind?
All to waste on doxies and drink.

Of such Fools' Paradise beware.
Ply honest labour, reap and plough;
In roughest service take your share;
If brain-work fail, to hand-work bow:
Content will come, and means enow.
But if to vicious schemes you sink,
Where go the fruits of it all, and how?
All to waste on doxies and drink.

Hose and doublet, feathers gay,
With these you'll hardly thrive, I think.
All such finery goes the same way:
All to waste on doxies and drink.

LAY

AT my return from prison drear,
Where pain had almost ended pain,
If Fortune still her spite retain,
How vengeful fond does she appear!
'Twould seem, in light of reason clear,
Such spite has nothing more to gain,
At my return.

If yet a senseless grudge she bear,
And very death of me ordain,
Pray God the soul, to His domain
Winging its flight, inhabit there,
At my return!

THE EPITAPH In Ballade Form, which Villon composed for Himself and his Companions while awaiting Death by Hanging.



EN, brothers, you who live when we are dead, Steel not your hearts against this woeful crew; One pitying look, one prayer, for that we plead,
So may God's pity one day light on you!
Here hang we helpless, shameless, in your view.
The flesh, which led us in its lusts astray,
Is torn, devoured and fall'n to foul decay,
As we, gaunt frames of bone, to dust shall fall.
Scorn not our evil plight, we dumbly pray;
Rather pray you God's mercy on us all.

If this we ask you, brothers, do not show
Contempt for us, although in truth we die
By justice. Never in this world, you know,
Could all men on their better selves rely.
Then raise for us one interceding cry
To that blest Son the Virgin Mother bore,
That by His grace our souls He should restore,
Redeeming us from Hell's infernal thrall.
Dead are we; no one should upbraid us more;
Rather pray you God's mercy on us all.

The driving rain has drenched us in its showers;
The sun has scorched and blackened us; the crow
And pie have stabbed these once clear eyes of ours,
And plucked with angry spite at beard and brow.
Never, O never, will the winds allow
A moment's pause, as to and fro we swing,
Their sport and pleasure humbly answering,
While carrion fowl fly round with croaking call.
Follow no lure that such a doom could bring;
Rather pray you God's mercy on us all.

Prince Jesus, Thou who over all art Lord,
Against Hell's power Thy sovereign help afford;
In some far peace our stormful souls install.
O fellow-men, speak here no mocking word;
Rather pray you God's mercy on us all.

THE REQUEST OF VILLON Presented to the Court of Parliament, in Ballade Form.

YOU, my five Senses, Eyes and Mouth and Ears, Nose, and the Touch that sees with its blind eye, And all my Limbs instinct with hopes and fears,
Each for itself, with lifted voices cry:
"O Sovereign Court through whom, though doomed to die,
We were snatched trembling from the black abyss,
The faltering Tongue suffices not, for this,
To render thanks in any word expressed;
Yet take our praise, King's Daughter, not amiss,
Mother of blessings, Sister of the blest!"

Melt, Heart; the floodgates of your tide unlock;
Be not at least more hardly obdurate
Than in the desert was the stubborn rock
That poured its streams the Jewish thirst to sate;
Let gentle showers your gladness consecrate,
As from a humble heart that, softened, sighs
Its praises to the Court so justly wise,
To subjects and to aliens distressed
A heaven-descended Saint in mortal guise,
Mother of blessings, Sister of the blest!

And you, my Teeth, leap each one from its cell;
Pronounce your gratitude with high acclaim
Shriller than note of organ, trump or bell;
Renounce your task assigned and fear no blame.
Think how I was bowed down with pain and shame,
Lungs, Liver, Spleen, that throb with vital glow.
And you, my Body, prostrate, fall'n as low
As bears and swine that crouch in miry nest,
Extol the Court, ere viler yet you grow,
Mother of blessings, Sister of the blest!

Prince, grant me three days yet, that I may pray
Of friends some means to help me on my way,
Helpless without them and of nought possessed;
Deign this, triumphant Court, nor say me nay,
Mother of blessings, Sister of the blest.

BALLADE Of Villon's Appeal.

OF my Appeal what think you now?
Did I do well or foolishly?
Each beast will save his skin, I trow;
Bind as you may, his best he'll try
To get again his liberty.
When half a word could win surcease
Of pains devised by cruelty,
Was that a time to hold my peace?

Had I been born of Capet's line,
That sprang in reek of butchery,
They had not made me drink the wine
Of Torture wise in devilry:

You know, I think, that pleasantry?
Then, when the Court, in grim caprice,
Had chanted me its homily,
Was that a time to hold my peace?

Beneath my cap, if not a deal,
There was enough philosophy
To make me stammer, "I appeal;"
This much could wisdom justify
In face of hard necessity.
"Be hanged!" the voice of doom decrees,
In presence of the Notary.
Was that a time to hold my peace?

Prince, had that time passed silently
The rope had shown its ended lease—
A blackened blotch against the sky.
Was that a time to hold my peace?

EPISTLE In Ballade Form to his Friends.

YOUR pity, friends, your pity I beseech,
If pity yet the human breast can fill,
If human aid this living grave can reach,
Where human sound comes not, for good or ill,
To one exiled by Fortune and God's will.
Girls, lovers, couples, comrades new and old;
Who dance, who skip with capers manifold,
Who race as swift as dart, as arrow straight;
All you who sing with joyous hearts and bold:
Poor Villon, will you leave him to his fate?

All you who sing for joy with artless glee;
Sly rogues who poke your fun in word and deed;
People who run through life, as madcaps free,
And, coinless, for the morrow take no heed:
Will you forsake your old friend at his need?
Makers of rhymes and rondels chanted clear,
When he is starved in vain you'll bring him cheer.

Nor lightning's gleam, nor sun's, can penetrate
The stony barriers that withhold him here:
Poor Villon, will you leave him to his fate?

Come and behold his load of suffering,
Nobles, on whom no tax or burden lies,
Who hold estate from neither lord nor king,
But only from the Lord of Paradise;
Look where, immured, he languishes and sighs,
His teeth on edge against the portion bare
Of driest bread that makes his bitter fare,
With watery floods his craving to abate;
A dungeon's floor at once his board and chair:
Poor Villon, will you leave him to his fate?

Princes, close friends, acquaintance high and low,
Entreat the King his pardon to bestow;
Snatch me from death before it is too late.
E'en swine some fellow-feeling seem to know,
For when one squeals the rest repeat his woe.
Poor Villon, will you leave him to his fate?

BALLADE Against the Slanderers of France.

AY he encounter monsters breathing flame,
As Jason once, with horror and amaze;
Or change from man to beast, as ancient fame
Reports of that changed King turned out to graze;
Or fall on fatal hap in many a shape,
As fell on Troy for Helen's willing rape;
In Stygian flood with Tantalus be cast,
An everlasting torment to outlast;
May he, a Job without his tolerance,
Like Dædalus be fixed in prison fast,
Who would bring evil on the realm of France!

May he for months, half drowned, with gasping breath,
Stand in some marsh, like bittern sorrowful;
Or, sold in Turkish market, sweat beneath
The yoke, aharnessed like a labouring bull;
Like Magdalen wear on from year to year,
With never scrap or rag for body's wear;
Drown like Narcissus in the welling spring;
Like Absalom by hairy halter swing;

Or at rope's end in air like Judas dance;
Or die, like Simon Magus, conjuring,
Who would bring evil on the realm of France!

For him may fierce Octavian's time come back,
And cram his treacherous throat with molten gold;
Or may two grinding stones his body rack,
As in a mill Saint Victor fared of old;
May he, engulfed, his latest breath exhale,
No Jonah this, to cruise in God-sent whale;
May he be driven from spheres of Phœbus bright,
From Juno's blessings and from Love's delight;
May each disastrous stroke and dire mischance
That vexed the Syrian King his being blight,
Who would bring evil on the realm of France!

Prince, may rough storm-winds hurl him to the deep
Where Glaucus reigns, and whirlpools round him sweep;
May peace its smile avert, and hope its glance;
All harvest of misfortune may he reap,
Who would bring evil on the realm of France!

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